

The Present Status of Women Researchers

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Women researchers in higher education institutions have increased steadily since the guarantee of equal educational rights under the Constitution and Education Act after World War II. In particular, the number of women researchers in science-related fields has increased, and recent governmental statistics show that there are 23,000 women researchers, comprising 6.3% of the total 370,000 regular researchers employed in research institutions throughout the country (including company, special corporative, public, private, university, and college institutions).

While the majority of women researchers are in university and college-affiliated positions, they comprise only 11% of the total number of researchers in those institutions. It is also noted that while present in every field, women researchers are in greater numbers in such fields as medical research, home economics, and the humanistic sciences, while few are in the social or natural sciences, engineering, or agricultural fields. Further, their real numbers diminish in inverse proportion to the rise in their professional status and prestige, and few women possess full professorships in national universities with post-graduate programs, although their contribution may be well-recognized in their particular field. In short, women researchers are steadily increasing in number, but are generally found in lower positions.

In the spring and autumn of 1978, inquiries were conducted into the actual situation of women researchers in higher education institutions. A number of detailed questionnaires concerning occupational conditions, family and community life were mailed and answers received from representatives of 348 public and 254 private institutions. While women researchers at public institutions in general fared better than those at private ones—as far as occupational and research conditions, academic background, career, teaching responsibilities, satisfaction with present post, etc.—all institutions seemed to offer little or no allowance when it came to maternity periods and this, among other examples, was cited as an instance of prejudice and sexual discrimination contributing to their discontent with their positions.

Meanwhile, in the private and individual spheres of their lives, in regard to marital and family life, the percentage of unmarried women and divorcees is relatively higher than average. Those married often have husbands who they married while both were post-graduate students or research assistants in their late twenties; hence, both are in the same profession. Such couples tend to share the domestic duties—the so-called colleague family—which involves the maintenance of household affairs and raising the children.

In the case of single women, while freed of the drudgery of housework as long as they live with their parents, they will later have to face the grim problem of supporting their parents in their old age, not to mention providing for their own old age.

Next, there are also professional worries women face. Indoctrinated

from a young age with the inferiority of their academic ability, there is a question of their own competence they feel they must answer to. Secondly, there are the institutional conditions. Third, and greatest, is related to the problem of work versus motherhood. The fourth is the prejudice and discrimination women face, which grows out of the sexual division of labor that is now a social convention. The fifth and final point is related to the organization, policy, and change society as a whole. These five factors are interrelated. While some are related to both men and women alike, some are peculiar to women, and others to women researchers as a particular type of professional woman, especially items two and four.

In summary, it is stated that these factors condition not only the status of women researchers in particular, but the general situation of higher education itself in present-day Japan.